

Message Text

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ACTION PM-03

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 AF-06 MMO-01 OMB-01

ACDA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00

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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 2428

EO 11652: GDS

TAGSC PFOR, MARR, CE, US, XO

SUBJ: EDITORIAL ONDIEGO GARCIA EXPANSION PLANS

REF: COLOMBO 2407; COLOMBO 2389

1. AUG 4 EDITORIAL IN GOVT-CONTROLLED
"CEYLON DAILY NEWS" (COLOMBO 2407) SEEMS TO
REPRESENT LATEST RECITATION OF GSL'S POSITION
ON DIEGO GARCIA EXPANSION PLANS AND BIG POWER PRESENCE
IN INDIAN OCEAN. EDITORIAL REITERATES BASIC
CEYLONESE VIEW THAT LITTLE SRI LANKA IS LIKELY TO
BE CAUGHT IN MIDDLE OF ANY BIG POWER COMPETITION
IN INDIAN OCEAN AREA, WHICH COULD CREATE THREAT
TO ITS INDEPENDENCE. THUS MILITARY PRESENCE IN
AREA BY ANY OUTSIDE BIG POWER.; INCLUDING US
MILITARY, IS INTRINSICALLY BAD. THIS FEELING
DOES NOT APPARENTLY APPLY TO OTHER FORMS OF
PRESENCE SUCH AS TRADE RELATIONS AND ECONOMIC
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ASSISTANCE.

2. ALTHOUGH MAIN THRUST OF EDITORIAL IS AGAINST DIEGO GARCIA AND THUS US, "BIG POWERS," RATHER THAN US, BEAR BRUNT OF CRITICISM, ALLUDING TO OTHER MILITARY PRESENCE IN AREA WHICH EDITORIAL ALSO DISAPPROVES. CURIOUSLY, EDITORIAL ALSO PLACES BLAME ON CONGRESS FOR DECISION WITHOUT REFERENCE TO ADMINISTRATION. FORMULATION MAY MERELY REFLECT MISUNDERSTANDING OF LEGISLATIVE PROCESS ON DIEGO GARCIA APPROPRIATION. HOWEVER, IT COULD ALSO REPRESENT GSL DESIRE NOT TO OFFEND FORM ADMINISTRATION. THERE HAS STILL BEEN NO OFFICIAL COMMENT PER SE ON THIS ISSUE, ALTHOUGH IT IS DOUBTFUL "DAILY NEWS" EDITORIAL WOULD BE PUBLISHED WITHOUT PRIOR CLEARANCE AT HIGH OR PERHAPS HIGHEST LEVEL OF GSL. OTHER ENGLISH-LANGUAGE AND ALL SINHALA NEWSPAPERS ARE CURRENTLY IGNORING ISSUE ENTIRELY.

3. EMBASSY BELIEVES GSL HAS HANDLED DIEGO GARCIA ISSUE IN MANNER WHICH HAS SO FAR DEMONSTRATED SENSITIVITY TO US INTERESTS. DIPLOMATIC CLEARANCE REQUEST FOR TWO US NAVAL SHIPS TO VISIT COLOMBO AT END OF AUGUST IS NOW BEFORE GSL. DECISION ON THIS REQUEST COULD PROVIDE INDICATION WHETHER DIEGO GARCIA EXPANSION WILL BRING WITH IT ANY CHANGE IN GSL ATTITUDE TOWARD US NAVAL SHIP VISITS TO SRI LANKA.
VAN HOLLEN

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